



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

April 24, 2017

The Honorable John Eichelberger, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Education Committee  
173 Main Capitol Building  
PO Box 203030  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3030

The Honorable Andrew Dinniman, Ed.D.  
Minority Chairman, Senate Education Committee  
182 Main Capitol Building  
PO Box 203019  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3019

The Honorable David Hickernell  
Chairman, House Education Committee  
43A East Wing  
PO Box 202098  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2098

The Honorable James Roebuck Jr., Ph.D.  
Minority Chairman, House Education Committee  
208 Irvis Office Building  
PO Box 202188  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2188

Dear Chairmen Eichelberger, Dinniman, Hickernell and Roebuck,

As the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) prepares to align programs and resources for the 2017-18 fiscal year, the agency is carefully reviewing our budget and the current proposals. The department looks forward to working with the General Assembly to ensure PDE can provide services and supports to local education agencies and schools, while controlling costs to taxpayers.

After reviewing the proposal that recently passed the House, I have serious concerns about the impact House Bill 218 would have on the department's ability to provide local school districts with appropriate support to serve students. Over the past several years, reductions in state allocations have negatively altered the breadth and depth of PDE's services and supports for the commonwealth's educational institutions. The spending cuts proposed in HB 218 will cause additional challenges, further hindering our ability to achieve the agency's vital mission of ensuring that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares children and adults to meet the rigorous expectations we collectively have set for them.

The proposed nine percent reduction to PDE's General Government Operations (GGO) line, in combination with other program cuts, will have the unintended consequence of creating unfunded mandates on local school districts. The reduction proposed in HB 218 could impact PDE personnel and operating funds, resulting in a projected furloughing of ten employees, nine within the GGO compliment and one from the State Library. In combination with the proposed elimination of the Safe Schools Initiative and Teacher Professional Development appropriations, the department will be forced to make difficult decisions about the ways that it can continue to support districts. In addition, the governor's proposed budget included \$2 million for an initiative that would leverage federal funds to improve low performing schools.

The Teacher Professional Development (TPD) appropriation recognizes the value of targeted, evidence-based and innovative professional development for Pennsylvania's 123,000 educators. PDE provides free, widely-accessible professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. While resources and tools provided through TPD funding is available for all Pennsylvania schools and educators, they are particularly important for smaller school districts, which lack resources to create standards-aligned curriculum on their own. The proposed elimination of this line will further complicate the allocation of scarce resources through the department's GGO funding.

I am also concerned by the potential impacts eliminating the Safe Schools Initiative and It's On Us PA Grants could have on students' safety and well-being. Both programs provide critical resources to K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions to not only meet state and federal requirements related to student safety and school climate, but also to ensure that schools have the tools they need to effectively prevent and address violence, harassment, and discrimination. The Safe Schools Initiative funds the Office of Safe Schools, which coordinates and assists schools in addressing student safety and security, including the Bullying Prevention Program and State Hotline. In 2016-17, 212 school districts, IUs, and local police departments received \$6 million in grants to help them provide violence prevention programs and public safety services in schools. These would be eliminated in HB 218, possibly resulting in some combination of higher school property taxes, reduction or elimination of school public safety programs, fewer trained personnel, and jeopardize student safety.

At the postsecondary level, the It's On Us PA Grants Program provides funding for public and private colleges and universities to improve their prevention, reporting, and response systems to combat the pervasive issue of campus sexual assault. These competitively awarded grants – up to \$30,000 per campus – support 36 public and private postsecondary institutions that are supporting campus-wide training for students, faculty and staff; raising awareness and understanding of reporting processes and resources; reduce and removing barriers to reporting; and enhancing data reporting and collecting capacity. Coupled with federal proposed cuts in violence prevention, costs of federally and state mandated sexual violence prevention, reporting and response systems would fall entirely on colleges and universities.

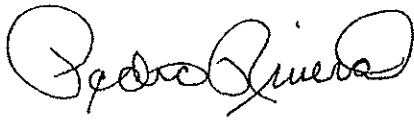
As we so often focus on the quality career preparation that takes place in Pennsylvania's high schools and area vocational-technical schools, I am concerned about the impact the 15 percent cut to the Career and Technical Education Equipment (CTE) Grants will have on programs. In 2016-17, 128 schools received \$3 million in CTE Equipment Grants, with awards ranging from \$2,250 to \$183,230. These funds help purchase equipment for use in CTE programs, including 3-D printers, high-tech medical

equipment, automotive equipment, and other tools. These grants help give CTE students hands-on experience with the equipment used by employers and professionals in high-priority occupations. A reduction of funding would mean schools would be using older equipment, potentially reducing the relevance of their training as job-ready students.

Finally, the governor's proposed budget recognizes the importance of providing our youngest learners with opportunities to learn and grow, and prioritizes significant new investments for Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance. HB 218's failure to allocate these much-needed resources misses an opportunity to ensure that Pennsylvania's low-income and working-class families have access to high-quality, affordable early learning programs. In 2015-16, less than 10 percent of eligible children were served in PA Pre-K Counts and approximately 20 percent of eligible children were served by Head Start. At the same time, 64 percent, or 114,329 of three- and four-year-old children living in eligible families (up to 300 percent of FPL) did not have access to publicly-funded, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs such as Pre-K Counts and Head Start.

Thank you for taking time to review these concerns with House Bill 218. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss these matters further and to continuing to work with you as we shape education policy that prioritizes the needs of all Pennsylvania students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pedro Rivera", written in a cursive style.

Pedro A. Rivera, Secretary  
PA Department of Education

CC: Senate Education Committee members  
House Education Committee members